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ABSTRACT

This paper compares a recent revision of the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary with four recently published word lists to find words common to at least three of the four word lists which were not on the Dolch list. These lists were consisted of the 500 most frequent words from the American Heritage Intermediate corpus, the 188 high frequency words from the Durr study of popular library books, the 500 most frequent words from the Kucera-Francis corpus, and the 727 words used at least fifty times by kindergarten and first-grade children in the Murphy study. The comparison of word lists revealed that 37 words appeared on at least three of the four word lists. These 37 words were added to the revision of the Dolch list. The result was a list of 227 words believed useful for the schools of the 1970's. This list is not only current and composed of words commonly used by young children, but it also has high utility at all levels of reading development. (WR)

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UPDATING THE DOLCH BASIC SIGHT VOCABULARY FOR THE SCHOOLS OF THE 1970'S

Research Report

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Word lists for reading instruction have long been of interest to educators. It has been noted by Johnson and Barrett (16) that over 125 word lists have been constructed during the past seventy years. Of these many word lists, there is little doubt that the Dolch list has received wide publication and use. Authors of textbooks on the teaching of reading (1, 8, 18, 23) have made reference to the Dolch list with suggestions for teaching the words. In addition, many reading materials have been developed to help teach these words in isolation and in context. Books have been written with the Dolch words and a small number of nouns to give children practice in using these words in a natural reading situation. Johnson (15) is probably correct in observing that hundreds of thousands of children have been asked to learn these 220 basic words.

The Dolch list has also recently been subjected to question and criticism in spite of the fact that numerous research studies (5, 8, 13, 22) have shown that the list comprises fifty to seventy per cent of the running words in basal reading series and other materials read by both children and adults. These criticisms appear to focus on the age of the Dolch list and the basis upon which the list was compiled.

Since the Dolch list was published in the 1930's from studies done in the 1920's, it is argued that the vast number of cultural changes which have taken place since that time make the Dolch list passé. A recent investigation by Johnson (15), moreover, indicates that nearly one-third of the Dolch words are not among the 220 most frequently

occurring words in adult materials. Johnson, Smith, and Jensen (17) have argued that the need to keep a word list up-to-date seems readily apparent.

The method Dolch (4) used to compile his list has been characterized as "pseudo-empirical" by Otto and Chester (21). Dolch selected 193 words which were common to three lists and then added twenty-seven words which were on at least two of the lists because they "obviously" belonged with the other 193 words.

In at least a partial response to such criticisms, Harris and Jacobson (9), Hillerich (10), Johns (11), Johnson (14), and Otto and Chester (21) have developed new word lists. A recent investigation by Johns (12) offered a revision of the Dolch list based upon four recently published word lists. To decide if any words should be removed from the Dolch list, it was compared to each of the word lists to find those Dolch words common to at least three of the four lists. It was found that 31 of the original 220 Dolch words were not common to at least three of the four word lists. These 31 words were subsequently deleted from the Dolch list thereby resulting in a revised Dolch list of 189 words.

Although this list of 189 words has probably provided an updating of the original Dolch list of 220 words, it is possible that there are words common to the four lists which are not on the Dolch list. It was the purpose of this study, therefore, to use the same four word lists in an effort to determine the words common to at least three of the four word lists which are not on the Dolch list. The four word lists used in the study are described below.

The first list contained the 500 most frequent words from the American Heritage Intermediate (AHI) Corpus compiled by Carroll, Davies, and Richman (3). The AHI Corpus was compiled from samples of school textbooks and other instructional materials used in grades three through nine (2). It contains 5,088,721 words drawn in 500-word samples from 1,045 texts. There are 86,741 different words in the Corpus. Although the AHI Corpus ". . . reflects neither the vocabulary that students know nor the vocabulary that the authors imagine they should know," (3, p.vii) it does indicate the vocabulary to which they are exposed.

By comparing the 500 most frequent words in the AHI Corpus to the Dolch list, it was possible to determine the number of words not on the Dolch list which were among the most frequently occurring words in the reading materials to which students are exposed in grades three through nine.

The second list contained 188 words from Durr's (7) computer study of high frequency words in trade books for children. The study involved eighty library books which were popular with primary-grade children. Librarians representing communities of varying socio-economic levels were asked to compile lists of books selected by primary-grade children when they had a free choice of books in the libraries. The lists were then ". . . submitted to experienced teachers who were well-acquainted with children's free reading interests. These teachers, taking into account the frequency of choice by librarians, selected the final eighty titles that were analyzed" (7, pp. 38-39). This procedure resulted in 105,280 running words and 5,791 different words. Of the 5,791 different words, 188 of these

words had more than 88 frequencies which accounted for 68.41 per cent of the running words in the library books.

By comparing the 188 words on the Durr study to the Dolch list, it was possible to determine the number of words not on the Dolch list which were among the most frequently occurring words in library books selected for reading by primary-grade children.

The third list contained the 500 most frequent words from the Corpus compiled by Kucera and Francis (19). The Corpus was compiled from a sample of published materials ". . . representing the full range of subject matter and prose styles, from the sports page of the newspaper to the scientific journal and from popular romantic fiction to abtruse philosophical discussion" (19, p. xix). The Kucera-Francis Corpus contains 1,014,232 words drawn in 500 samples of approximately 2,000 words each. There are 50,406 different words in the Corpus.

By comparing the 500 most frequent words in the Kucera-Francis Corpus to the Dolch list, it was possible to determine the number of words not on the Dolch list which were among the most frequently occurring words in so-called "adult" materials.

The last list contained 727 words from the Murphy analysis. Murphy and others (20) tabulated a running count of 1,195,098 words in the oral vocabulary of children in kindergarten through the third grade. Of the 6,318 different words used by the children in kindergarten and first grade, 727 words were used at least fifty times by these children.

By comparing the 727 words from the Murphy study to the Dolch list, it was possible to determine the number of words not on the Dolch list which were among the words used orally by kindergarten and first-grade children.

In analyzing the word lists in the present investigation, there were a number of assumptions believed to be essential.

First, the list should not contain any nouns (proper or otherwise). Dolch (4) believed that nouns cannot be universal in nature because each noun is tied to a special subject matter and "local" to a particular activity or interest. Since his word list is "basic", it includes only the "tool" words that are used in all writing regardless of the subject. In a recent research study Durr (6) found that the twenty-five words which accounted for 35.35 per cent of the running words in popular trade books for children were structure words, pronouns, verbs, or verb markers. There were no nouns. Although the Dolch list of basic sight words contains only conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, and verbs, a few words (e.g., fly, today, show) may function as nouns depending upon the context in which they appear.

Second, the list should contain words that are frequently used by young children. Otto and Chester (21) question the relevance of children's spoken vocabulary to a basic sight word list; nevertheless, in this study it is assumed that a "basic" word list should contain words which are in the spontaneous speaking vocabulary of children in kindergarten and first grade.

Third, the list should have high utility at all levels of reading development. In other words, the list should contain words that appear frequently in all types of reading materials at all grade levels.

In addition to these basic assumptions, it is also believed that the list should be brief, current, and combine regularly inflected forms of a given root word. A word like call, for example, would represent calls, called, and calling.

With these assumptions in mind, the researcher compared the four word lists to the revised Dolch list of 189 words. Table 1 contains the number of words on each of the four word lists which were not on the revised Dolch list.

The words on these four lists were then compared to find those words common to at least three of the word lists. Table 2 contains those words which meet the above criterion. Adding these 37 words to the 189 word revision of the Dolch list resulted in the 226 words in Table 3.

The process of adding 37 words to the revision of the Dolch list should adequately update the original Dolch list for the schools of the 1970's. This list of 226 words offers teachers several advantages which do not necessarily exist with the original Dolch list.

The first advantage is that the list is "basic" in that it contains "tool" words used in all writing regardless of subject matter. Since words from the Kucera-Francis Corpus and the American Heritage Intermediate Corpus were used, the list should have high utility at all levels of reading development.

The second advantage is that the list contains, with a few exceptions, words that are in the spontaneous speaking vocabulary of children in kindergarten and first grade. Primary grade teachers can, therefore, be reasonably sure that children have frequently used these words in their everyday speech.

The third advantage is that the revised list is current. Words on the revised list are based on word count studies completed within the last two decades. (In fact, three of the four word count studies were compiled within the past four years.)

The word list for the 1970's draws upon both the original Dolch basic sight vocabulary and recent word count studies. It is possible for teachers to use the word list for the 1970's in much the same way that the Dolch list has been used for over thirty years. Children who know these 226 words by sight will have a current basic reading vocabulary which will be useful throughout their schooling.

Table 1

Number of Words on Recent Word Lists Not

on the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary

Word List	Number of Words Not on Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary
1. American Heritage Intermediate List (500 Words)	303
2. Durr List (188 Words)	47
3. Kucera-Francis List (500 Words)	330
4. Murphy List (727 Words)	526

Table 2

Words (Excluding Nouns and Inflected Forms) Common to at Least Three Recently Published Word Lists That Are Not on the Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary

	Word	Word List		Word	Word List
1.	across	(AHI, K-F, M)	19.	most	(AHI, K-F, M)
2.	another	(AHI, K-F, M)	20.	near	(AHI, K-F, M)
3.	began	(AHI, K-F, D)	21.	need	(AHI, K-F, M)
4.	close	(AHI, K-F, M)	22.	next	(AHI, K-F, M, D)
5.	didn't	(AHI, K-F, M)	23.	oh	(AHI, M, D)
6.	enough	(AHI, K-F, M, D)	24.	other	(AHI, K-F, M, D)
7.	even	(AHI, K-F, M, D)	25.	same	(AHI, K-F, M)
8.	gone	(AHI, K-F, M)	26.	short	(AHI, K-F, M)
9.	hard	(AHI, K-F, M, D)	27.	should	(AHI, K-F, M)
10.	heard	(AHI, K-F, M)	28.	still	(AHI, K-F, M, D)
11.	high	(AHI, K-F, M)	29.	than	(AHI, K-F, D)
12.	I'm	(AHI, K-F, M)	30.	thought	(AHI, K-F, D)
13.	last	(AHI, K-F, M)	31.	through	(AHI, K-F, M)
14.	leave	(AHI, K-F, M)	32.	told	(AHI, K-F, M, D)
15.	left	(AHI, K-F, M)	33.	took	(AHI, K-F, M, D)
16.	mean	(AHI, K-F, M)	34.	toward	(AHI, K-F, M)
17.	might	(AHI, K-F, M)	35.	turn	(AHI, K-F, M, D)
18.	more	(K-F, M, D)	36.	while	(AHI, K-F, M, D)
			37.	yet	(AHI, K-F, M)

AHI: The 500 most frequent words in the American Heritage Intermediate Corpus.

K-F: The 500 most frequent words in the Kucera-Francis Corpus.

M: The 727 words that had been used at least 50 times by kindergarten and first-grade children who took part in the Murphy study.

D: The 188 words of more than 88 frequencies from the Durr study of popular trade books for children.

Table 3

A Word List for the 1970's Based on
Four Recently Published Word Lists

a	don't	in	only	think
about	down	into	open	this
across*	draw	is	or	those
after	eat	it	other*	thought*
again	enough*	its	our	three
all	even*	just	out	through*
always	every	keep	over	to
am	far	kind	own	today
an	fast	know	play	together
and	find	last*	put	told*
another*	first	leave*	ran	too
any	five	left*	read	took*
are	for	let	red	toward*
around	found	light	right	try
as	four	like	round	turn*
ask	from	little	run	two
at	full	long	said	under
away	gave	look	same*	up
be	get	made	saw	upon
because	give	make	say	us
been	go	many	see	use
before	going	may	she	very
began*	gone*	me	short*	walk
best	good	mean*	should*	want
better	got	might*	show	warm
big	green	more*	six	was
black	grow	most*	small	we
blue	had	much	so	well
both	hard*	must	some	went
bring	has	my	soon	were
but	have	near*	start	what
by	he	need*	still*	when
call	heard*	never	stop	where
came	help	next*	take	which
can	her	new	tell	while*
close*	here	no	ten	white
cold	high*	not	than*	who
come	him	now	that	why
could	his	of	the	will
cut	hold	off	their	with
did	hot	oh*	them	work
didn't*	how	old	then	would
do	I	on	there	yes
does	I'm*	once	these	yet*
done	if	one	they	you
				your

*Words added to the 189 word revision of the Dolch basic sight vocabulary.

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